



Child Mind
Institute

The California
**Healthy Minds,
Thriving Kids**
Project



Educator Implementation Guide

Middle School



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The California Healthy Minds, Thriving Kids Project is a collaborative initiative with Governor and First Partner Newsom to make preventive mental health skills accessible to every child in the State of California.

The resources available through this project seek to:

- Teach skills students can use for the rest of their lives
- Normalize conversations about mental wellbeing
- Reflect the diversity of our communities

The evidence-based video series for middle school students is comprised of 5 videos along with this Educator Implementation Guide. Skill videos are centered around the following 5 areas of focus:



Understanding Feelings

Building a foundation for healthy coping



Relaxation Skills

Skills for stressful situations



Understanding Thoughts

How thoughts impact feelings and behavior



Managing Intense Emotions

Skills for coping with uncomfortable feelings



Mindfulness

Improving self-awareness and decision-making

Middle School

Implementation Options

Option 1

Whole School or Grade-Level Assembly

This video series can be shown to large groups of students in one session. This option has the benefit of reaching many students at once with less of a time commitment. With this option, follow-up is essential since it is unlikely that students will fully absorb all skills in a single session, and the opportunity to process and practice skills one at a time is something that can hopefully be integrated in brief doses over the ensuing days/weeks. Here are a few suggestions for how to make this delivery option most effective:

A. Show all 5 videos in sequence over a period of approximately 45 minutes. Afterward, in individual classrooms, such as advisory or another designated time, educators can provide students with opportunity to engage in reflective discussion.

- Possible Discussion Questions

“What resonated with you during the videos?”

“What do you already know about mental health?”

“Which skills do you think would be most helpful?”

“How can we practice them together?”

- Additionally, to help facilitate discussion, educators can utilize the 5 activity sheets included at the conclusion of this Implementation Guide to help reinforce skills shown and provide an opportunity for reflection and practice of skills. For example:

Understanding Feelings activity sheet helps students monitor and track their emotions by labeling the feeling, rating the intensity, and describing physical sensations attached to the feeling.

Relaxation activity sheet helps students practice paced breathing and plan for when to use it.

Understanding Thoughts activity sheet helps students to be mindful of their thinking, recognize when it’s unhelpful, and practice alternative ways of thinking that can improve how they are feeling and what they will do.

Managing Intense Emotions activity sheet helps students utilize their five senses and create a self-soothe kit to help them tolerate intense emotions.

Mindfulness activity sheet provides students with different activities for practicing three core areas of mindfulness.

B. When showing the video series, educators can pause after each of the 5 videos to ask students to practice a skill or reflect on what they have just learned. For example:

- After watching **Understanding Feelings**, educators can ask students to label all the emotions they feel in that very moment and direct their awareness to where they are feeling these emotions in their body.
- After watching **Relaxation Skills**, educators can request that students take 30 seconds to practice paced belly breathing.
- After watching **Understanding Thoughts**, educators can lead students in identifying an unhelpful thought they may have had that day and what could have been an alternative thought or way of interpreting the situation.
- After watching **Managing Intense Emotions**, educators can help students reflect on how they already use their 5 senses to self-soothe and what they might add to their self-soothe kit.
- After watching **Mindfulness**, educators can facilitate students' practice of a 30-second mindfulness activity. For example, have students name 5 things they see, 4 things they hear, 3 things they feel, 2 things they smell, and 1 thing they taste.

Option 2

Delivery of the Curriculum in Smaller Groups Over Time

This video series can easily be viewed in individual advisories or classrooms, such as health classes. This option has the benefit of ensuring that students engage with the material and provides space for further discussion and practice. Here are a few suggestions for how to make this delivery option most effective:

A. Utilizing one advisory section or class each day of a week to show one content area of the video series.

- With this option, students would be able to view and discuss the full video series in one week. After each video, educators would have the ability to facilitate discussion and utilize the activity sheet or suggestions for that video as a way of practicing skills learned.

B. Utilizing one advisory or class to show one content area of the video series each week.

- With this option, students would be able to view and discuss the full video series in 5 weeks. After each video, educators would have the ability to facilitate discussion and utilize the activity sheet or suggestions for that video as a way of practicing skills learned. Educators would also be able to utilize the week in between new content videos to reinforce skill practice.

C. Utilize one advisory section or class to show one content area of the video series each month.

- With this option, students would be able to view and discuss the full video series over a period of 5 months. After each video, educators would have the ability to facilitate discussion and utilize the activity sheet or suggestions for that video as a way of practicing skills learned. This provides educators and students with the opportunity to deeply reflect on how to integrate the skill learned into daily or weekly practices over the full month. Schools can also create themes around the topic and fully integrate skills through the school day.

Option 3

Student Guided Viewing with In-School Discussion

This video series can be assigned to students as an activity to complete outside of school, framed as a self-guided opportunity to interact and engage with the materials at students' own pace. The benefit of this option is that it does not require as much time during school hours, and some students may feel more comfortable engaging with the material at home.

Because video content is watched outside of school, students can utilize advisory or another designated class to engage in activity sheet practice and reflective discussion of the video content. Students can be assigned one content area per day, per week, or per month, with educators continuing to reinforce skill discussion, integration, and practice at school.

Integration Guide

The California Healthy Minds, Thriving Kids Project is designed to be fully accessible to students as a resource that can be completed independently. Educators still play an important role in helping students with the continued practice of these skills. This guide provides helpful tips for reinforcing the content and skills from each video in your classrooms along with suggestions for continued implementation.

The student-teacher relationship and climate of the school is paramount in setting the foundation for students' mental health and wellness. This is especially important in middle school, a time of transition and when students start to explore questions about the future, about their identity, and about their relationships. Students thrive when educators provide a space where students feel comfortable, accepted, and validated. By practicing the skills in this curriculum together, we can make our communities more healthy, thriving, and vibrant.



Understanding Feelings

KEY POINTS

- All emotions are normal, healthy, and important because they provide pre-teens with information about themselves and their environment and help them to connect to other people.
- Students learn to label emotions, notice physical sensations associated with emotions, and rate the intensity of their emotions.

TIPS FOR REINFORCING

- Emotional validation is a foundational skill educators can use in their classrooms to help students increase their emotional awareness. Example:
“I hear you had a frustrating experience. That sounds difficult.”
- Give your full attention (**Listen**), repeat back what the emotion was that they shared (**Reflect**), and connect with them by saying you understand (**Connect**).
- Bring emotions into academic work and label what characters or historical figures may be feeling.
- Model sharing your feelings as a way to normalize emotions.



Relaxation Skills

KEY POINTS

- Pre-teens learn that stress, anxiety, and frustration can produce uncomfortable physical sensations due to our fight, flight, or freeze response. Relaxation skills help to calm the body and turn down the intensity of these unpleasant feelings
- Paced belly breathing is a foundational relaxation skill that involves breathing slowly and deeply at a steady pace to return their mind and body to a calmer state.

TIPS FOR REINFORCING

- Encourage students to practice paced belly breathing when they are calm or before engaging in a stressful activity.
- Practice as a class by taking a few minutes before starting work to set the tone for the rest of the class.
- Post the steps of paced belly breathing from the activity sheet in your class as a reminder to take a moment to breathe.

Understanding Thoughts

KEY POINTS

- How we think has an impact on what we do and how we feel. It's common to fall into unhelpful thinking patterns that can cause overwhelmed and anxious feelings.
- Recognizing and reframing unhelpful thoughts is a skill that can decrease uncomfortable emotions and help to manage difficult situations.
- Remember, thoughts are not facts; they are temporary; they can be helpful or unhelpful, and you can practice changing your thinking.

TIPS FOR REINFORCING

- You can use academics to highlight thinking about all possibilities, ways to consider different perspective, or moments when characters or historical figures have engaged in unhelpful thinking.
- Use positive feedback when you notice students pausing and recognizing their thinking patterns.
- Reinforce awareness of thinking by asking questions like:
“What thoughts are you having?” or
“What were your thoughts in that situation?”
“How is that thought making you feel?”
- To help challenge unhelpful thoughts you can ask students:
“What are the facts about the situation?”
“Is this thought kind to you? And if not, how can you be fair to yourself?”

Managing Intense Emotions

KEY POINTS

- Everyone experiences intense emotions and the urges that come with them, and it's important to know that the intensity of emotions does not last forever.
- Pre-teens can ride out intense feelings and urges by utilizing their 5 senses and different activities to ground themselves in the present and to help them tolerate how they feel.
- Waiting for the intensity to pass allows for greater control in choosing what they do next.

TIPS FOR REINFORCING

- Validate emotions by showing students that you're listening and that you empathize with how they feel.
- Provide space for students to calm down and use self-soothing materials to help with intensity of feelings.
- Allow for healthy coping options such as journaling or drawing that students might be able to utilize in your classroom.
- Provide positive feedback as you notice students utilizing healthy strategies to tolerate emotions.
- Model opportunities when you might use healthy strategies to ride out the wave of intense emotions.

KEY POINTS

- Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention on purpose to the present moment, without judging or trying to change your experience.
- The practice of mindfulness can help students to increase their self-awareness and self-control, reduce their emotional suffering, and increase compassion for themselves and others.
- Regular practice of mindfulness skills will help to foster an increased sense of well-being:

Observe: Notice, without words, what is going on in the environment.

Describe: Name what you notice using descriptive and nonjudgmental language.

Participate: Throw yourself fully into an activity or experience.

TIPS FOR REINFORCING

- When it comes to mindfulness practice, everything that is taught has to be lived.
- Start by setting one minute of mindfulness practice before the start of class. This can include:
 - One minute of observing with their five senses.
 - Paced Belly Breathing
 - Mindful coloring
- Protecting that one minute of mindfulness practice communicates to your students the importance of the practice and sets a mindful intention each day.
- You can recommend and utilize mindfulness-based apps, including Headspace, Calm, Shine, and others, to provide different guided activities.

Activity Sheets

Practicing these skills helps you to increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to improve your mental health and wellness.



Feelings Intensity and Body Response

Use this activity to help practice labeling feelings, rating their intensity, and identifying which body sensations you may feel with these emotions. First circle the ratings below to indicate how much you've experienced each feeling within the past week, with 0 being not at all and 10 being the most intense.

joyful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
anxious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
frustrated	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
fearful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
depressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
calm	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
disgusted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
content	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
hopeful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



faster heart rate	sweaty palms	clenched teeth	nausea
tension in neck and shoulders	slower heart rate	steady breath	more energy
stomachache	furrowed brows	clenched fists	shaky
tightness in chest	headache	pursed lips	urge to run
weakened or shaky legs	reddened or hot cheeks	shallow or quickened breathing	heaviness

Follow-Up

When you rate your feelings, you're gathering data about your experiences over the past week. If there are emotions that you're hoping to feel more or less, the skills reviewed in the additional videos and worksheets of this curriculum will help. You can use worksheets like this one each week to track your progress and figure out how the skills might be affecting your feelings.

Paced Belly Breathing

Breathing deeply into your belly helps to tell your body that you are safe and calm. Follow the instructions below and practice paced belly breathing when you are feeling calm and when you are feeling stressed or anxious.



- 1 Sit comfortably in your chair or on the floor either cross-legged or on your shins.



- 2 Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest.



- 3 Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds and feel your belly expand.



- 4 Slowly breathe out for 5 seconds through your mouth, letting the air gently leave your body.



- 5 Repeat 3-5 times, or for as long as you want.

Use the space below to think about times to practice paced belly breathing:

Before going to bed

Before taking a big test

Before sports practice

In the morning at school

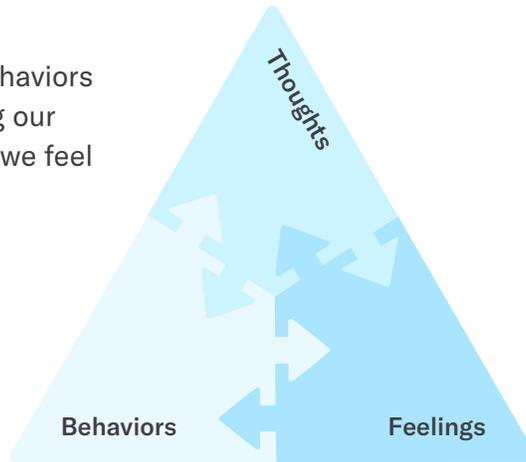
After getting into an argument with a friend

Outside, sitting down, and enjoying nature

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

Remember thoughts are not facts, and sometimes thoughts are unhelpful to us. One way of practicing understanding your thoughts is by keeping track of them when you notice uncomfortable feelings. Below is a thought log. Practice identifying what was happening at the time, what your thought was, how you felt, and what you did. If you notice that the thought was unhelpful, try to change it to a more realistic or helpful thought, and then see if that would change your feelings and behaviors.

Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected. By changing our thoughts, we can change how we feel and how we behave.



Event	Unhelpful Thought	Feeling	Alternative/Helpful Thought

Here are some things you can ask yourself when trying to change your thoughts:

- What is the likelihood that this will happen?
- Is this realistic?
- What is the evidence that this is true?
- Is there another way I can think about this?

Follow-Up

When you notice how your thoughts are connected to how you feel, you're gathering data about yourself. If you notice that certain ways of thinking are not all that helpful or lead to uncomfortable feelings, remember that you have the power to slow down and consider when there might be other ways of thinking about the situation. The skills reviewed in the additional videos and worksheets of this curriculum can also help!

Self-Soothe Kit

You can use your five senses to self-soothe and help tolerate intense emotions. Use the guide below to create your own self-soothe kit.

You can carry this self-soothe kit with you so you always have what you need to tolerate intense feelings.

5 Senses	One thing that makes me calm and relaxed is:	Stumped on what to pick? Here are some suggestions:
See		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calming colors • A relaxing scene • Small picture of my favorite person, family member, athlete; or place to visit
Hear		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to rainstorm or ocean sounds • Recordings of funny jokes or comedians • Happy or soothing music
Smell		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good-smelling hand lotion • Small perfume bottle • A scented candle
Taste		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pieces of your favorite candy or other treat like gum or a mint
Touch		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satin ribbon or soft fabric • A small pompom or pouf • A small feather • A stress ball • Slime

Mindfulness Skills & Activities

The more you practice mindfulness the more it will help our mental muscles to have better focus, attention, and awareness. You can choose from many activities below to practice the skills of mindfulness.



Observe
Skill



Describe
Skill



Participate Fully
Skill

Counting Breaths

Paced belly breathing

Listening to music and paying attention to one instrument

Going for a walk and naming what you see

Mindfully eating your favorite food

Playing an instrument

Journaling

Dancing

Using recommended apps to guide you:

- Calm
- Headspace
- Shine
- Mindfulness for Children
- Thrive for Alexa: Amazon
- Take a Chill
- OMG I Can Meditate